

THE
OARSOME
CHALLENGE



IMPACT REPORT
2017-2019

INTRODUCTION

There is no better way to connect with the River Thames than by rowing on it. For three years from 2017 to 2019 (the Covid pandemic caused the 2020 event to be cancelled) the Oarsome Challenge has raised more than £100,000 for river-based charities and Tideway's charity partners, delivering significant benefits to disadvantaged people in communities across London.

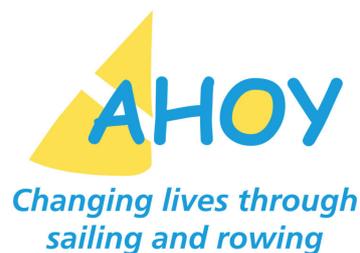
It has also brought together hundreds of project staff, almost all of them with little or no experience of rowing, in a shared experience which very few people can lay claim to – rowing through the centre of the capital, enjoying unique views of its major and landmarks, while taking on the physical and team challenge to row a large 'skerry' or 'cutter' boat in tidal waters.

This report will describe each event; outline the benefits delivered; and show how the Oarsome Challenge has allowed staff to 'reconnect' with the River Thames and the company to demonstrate 'activation' of the opportunities that will be provided by a cleaner river.

About **300** Tideway project staff connected with the Thames

Funding jobs, apprenticeships
& equipment for
**RIVER-BASED
CHARITIES**

More than
£100,000
raised in three years



THE 2017 EVENT

The genesis of the Oarsome Challenge was a visit by Andrew Triggs Hodge, Tideway's reconnection programme manager, to the AHOY Centre in Deptford for a volunteering day. The AHOY Centre provides opportunities for disadvantaged, disabled and at-risk young people through sailing and rowing, teaching life and employability skills. The charity has also run corporate rowing challenge events and Andy saw the opportunity for Tideway's project staff, which was growing rapidly as construction began across its 24 sites, to come together and raise funds for the centre. Andy said: "It's our goal to reconnect London with the River Thames and to see the full potential of a cleaner river realised. Increased recreational use will be a valuable part of the future for the river, but it needs an injection of energy and will to activate it. Tideway has been perfectly placed to bring all the stakeholders together to realise this – and the Oarsome Challenge is our internal expression of this."



Tideway staff embraced the challenge laid down by Andy. Fifteen teams of 6 – a total of 90 people - signed up and rowed east from Chelsea, near Tideway's Chelsea Embankment Foreshore site, to Deptford, near its Deptford Church Street and Greenwich sites. Many of the teams also got into the spirit of fun and teamwork by completing the challenge in fancy dress. With matched funding, a total of £37,000 was raised and afterwards the teams were full of praise. Chris Stratford, Stakeholder and Consents manager for the West delivery team, said: "It was a blast. Great to just go along the Thames at a non-motorised speed and view the wonderful sights just before sunset." Director Roger Bailey said: "We all really enjoyed it! Rowing right through London on a beautiful summer evening was genuinely awesome. I certainly feel connected to the river now. A top event all round!"

Andy Mitchell, Tideway CEO, also took part in the challenge. He said: "To be part of an event where so many of the Tideway team were out on the water, while raising a fantastic amount of money for a worthy cause, was a fantastic and inspirational event to be part of. I hope our fundraising helps the AHOY Centre in continuing their invaluable work to get people out on the River Thames."

THE 2018 EVENT

The 2018 event was a 'change up' from the previous year – a longer course, bigger boats, more crews, and a new charity partner to deliver the event in Shadwell Basin Outdoor Activity Centre (SBOAC), in Wapping. 128 rowers completed a 12-mile row from Hammersmith, next to Tideway's Hammersmith Pumping Station site, to Wapping next to its King Edward Memorial Park site, raising money to fund a new post at SBOAC to co-ordinate its fundraising and volunteering activities.

SBOAC enables access for young people from low economic backgrounds and disabilities into sports like sailing and rowing through heavily subsidised courses which are often financially out of reach

The crews, competing in larger eight-person 'skerries' rather than six-person 'cutter' boats, once again got into the fancy dress mode and finished by 8pm at SBOAC, clambering up the new slipway funded by the Tideway project (our King Edward Memorial Park site is next door to the centre).



The longer course proved challenging for many of the novice rowers but any blisters were soon forgotten at an excellent 'after party' at the Shadwell Basin centre. Matt Parr, captain of the 'Seven Under Parr' team, said: "A fantastic event – what a privilege to row through central London and wonderful to finish at the centre where our funds will benefit young people from Tower Hamlets and the surrounding area."

A total of £36,700 was raised - the majority of this was used for the SBOAC fundraising post and the remainder went to Tideway three staff charities – Single Homeless Project, Drive Forward Foundation and South London Cares. It would be several months before the fundraising post was filled, but it delivered benefits for the centre into 2020 – see Impact section.

THE 2019 EVENT

The third Oarsome Challenge saw a course switch from west-east to east-west, starting at SBOAC, Wapping and finishing 13 miles later in Chiswick, the longest event to date. The 16 boats of 8 oars, 128 people, rowed in 'processional' style up to Putney Bridge, before a final 4km 'sprint', following the course of the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race, to the finish line at Chiswick Bridge.

The funds raised paid for a new community boat to get young people from London active through rowing. Additional funds raised went to Tideway's three staff charity partners and the event raised a total of more than £34,000, taking the Oarsome Challenge fundraising total over the £100k mark within three years.



The event was blessed with exceptional high summer weather and teams from Tideway sites came out to cheer on their site teams and project colleagues as they rowed past. The West Delivery Team, AKA the Drunken Octopuses, won three prizes - fastest mixed crew, most money raised and best fancy dress.

Matt Rostron, CEO of London Youth Rowing, told the rowers: "You were amazing. The level of enthusiasm, excitement, flexibility, love of fancy dress, your unending sense of humour and your 'let's do this thing' attitude was a joy to be part of. You should all be very proud of what you did."

THE IMPACT

The £37,000 raised for the AHOY Centre supported the charity's core programmes in one of London's most under-privileged areas in 2017. The Shipmates programme supported 45 young people aged 8 to 18 from the Deptford area to develop skills from basic teamwork on water and land through to team leadership and a number gained Royal Yachting Association and British Rowing qualifications. Some Shipmates also became volunteers at the centre, helping to train new recruits and maintaining the site and boats. The weekly Sailability group offered 15 young adults with learning disabilities lessons in sailing, rowing and independent living and basic DIY skills. The Pathway to Employment apprenticeship programme offers qualifications linked to opportunities in industries such as water sports, commercial marine and education and, thanks in part to Tideway's funding, had its largest-ever intake. During 2017 two AHOY apprentices and one of the Shipmates secured full-time employment as RYA Instructors.

Clive Ongley, AHOY's founder and CEO, said: "The support from Tideway has been incredible – firstly, with some of their volunteers helping out at the centre on several days and then to secure 15 teams to fundraise for us. The funds raised will support more disadvantaged and vulnerable young people to achieve and find employment and enable them to have a future."

Fundraising from the 2018 challenge allowed Shadwell Basin Outdoor Activity Centre to employ a Fundraising and Volunteering Co-ordinator. Carl Greenslade was recruited and is responsible for fundraising, grant applications and co-ordinating volunteers. Since 2018 Carl (pictured below with Centre Director Mike Wardle) has secured grants of more than £55,000 and has organised corporate volunteering events that have generated almost 700 hours of support, saving the centre £9,000 in labour costs and almost £2,00 in other resources, as well as generating great volunteer engagement.





SBOAC Director Mike Wardle said: “We all would like to thank Tideway Rowers from the bottom of our hearts for taking the time to raise money for us as a charity and take part in such a Challenge. We hope that they themselves felt achievement, made friends, learnt infinite possibilities about themselves and have had the blisters heal to leave good memories of what they did.”

The funds raised in the 2019 event paid for a new community boat – only the 16th skerry to be built to operate on the River Thames – which will be run by London Youth Rowing and other charities, in order to get young people from London active through rowing.

It was built by master boat builder Mark Edwards MBE, who built the Royal Barge Gloriana, but has yet to be used for community rowing because of the Coronavirus pandemic. It has been named the Ada Salter, after the social reformer and environmentalist from Bermondsey who became the first woman mayor in London.

It is currently in storage and will be used to get young people onto the water later in 2021, including at events such as the beginners’ regattas run by LYR as part of their Active Row programme, funded by Tideway (pictured).



Matt Rostron, CEO of LYR, said: “The boat will be used to get young people from across the capital out to and on to the river. Truly re-connecting London to its river – and that’s down to the Tideway teams who took part. The most amazing stat for me was that Oarsome Challenge series has now raised over £100,000 for charities like ours – that is unbelievable, thank you.” The Oarsome Challenge also supported LYR’s aim to develop its staff’s on-water skills and experience and the 2019 event was so successful that the charity aims to adopt it as a long term ‘activation’ event for corporate and other teams, taking advantage in the long term of the opportunity to increase use of the cleaner river.

Within that £100k total, the Oarsome Challenge has raised about £20,000 for Tideway’s three staff charity partners - Single Homeless Project, Drive Forward Foundation and South London Cares. The funds were used to support both the charities’ programmes and core costs in 2018 and 2019, which has ensured that they could support some of the most vulnerable people in London, offering accommodation and support to the homeless (SHP); to supporting young car leavers in their lives and to find employment (DFF); and offering friendship and companionship to older, isolated people in South London (SLC).



The event has also had a positive impact on around 300 Tideway’s staff and Main Works Contractors, bringing them together in a shared experience to reconnect with the river and support local communities, as well as bring them closer to the river charities for whom they were raising money. This reaction from Louise Walsh, a participant in 2019, summarises the wider benefit of the event: “The challenge was fantastic – lots of aching body parts but all well worth it! A truly unforgettable experience which we all loved.”



The event has been run by Andy Triggs Hodge, Tideway’s reconnection programme manager, who said: “The Oarsome Challenge has been Tideway’s main way to connect our staff and contractors with the potential of the clean river. Aligning with the PLA’s vision for the river, Tideway has shown what is possible for London’s largest underused asset, the River Thames. It has been hugely inspiring to see how a large organisation has taken on a completely new challenge, in a unique environment, and thrived.”



Tideway

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